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SUBJECT: USS REUBEN JAMES VISITS TIMOR-LESTE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The USS Reuben James visited Timor-Leste February 21-24 and completed highly successful military-to-military engagements, humanitarian engineering projects, and community relations activities. Led by the Chief of the Timorese Defense Forces (F-FDTL), the F-FDTL engaged with the U.S. sailors on board the USS Reuben James as well as at the Timorese Naval Port at Hera and on the two Timorese vessels. Although the Timorese army has been an enthusiastic participant in past visits, this was the first time the Timorese navy has engaged closely with their U.S. counterparts. This visit along with the continued engagement from U.S. Pacific Command continues to strengthen bilateral relations and contribute to our Mission strategic goal of maintaining peace and stability in Timor-Leste. End Summary.

The Visit of the USS Reuben James

¶2. (U) The USS Reuben James, a guided missile frigate, visited Timor-Leste February 21-24. Spending three days anchored in the Dili port in full view of the local population, the USS Reuben James hosted a diplomatic reception for local dignitaries (including the Prosecutor General and the F-FDTL Chief of Staff), welcomed the F-FDTL Chief of Defense Forces Major General Taur Matan Ruak for a personal tour, and dispatched about 120 Navy personnel ashore for liberty in and around Dili each night without incident.

Navy Community Relations Activities

¶3. (U) The sailors from the USS Reuben James conducted several community relations activities including a Project Handclasp donation of medical supplies to the National Hospital and visits to two Dili orphanages to donate medical supplies and toys. The sailors also brought with them donations from the 7th Fleet's Spouse Group to the Alola Foundation, an NGO founded by Kirsty Sword Gusmao, the Prime Minister's wife. Many of the sailors also helped to paint the interior of the National University, working together with the resident U.S. Navy Construction Battalion (Seabees) detachment and local Timorese. The sailors from the Reuben James also had the opportunity to participate in a soccer tournament between the F-FDTL sailors and the Australian-led International Stabilization Force (ISF).

Bilateral engagement between the U.S. and Timorese Military

¶4. (U) Twenty F-FDTL sailors engaged directly with U.S. sailors aboard the USS Reuben James, sharing experience and expertise. After declining a number of invitations in the past, this was the first time that the Timorese navy has participated in such an exercise (Note: The F-FDTL army, engineering, and other units

have all been enthusiastic participants of such engagements in the past, but a combination of over-strained personnel resources and personality issues have obstructed participation by the navy). Following the session aboard the USS Reuben James, a group of U.S. sailors accompanied the F-FDTL to Port Hera to tour their navy base and visit their two Albatroz-class patrol boats.

Comment

15. (SBU) The visit of the USS Reuben James to Timor-Leste was extremely successful. Post welcomes such opportunities from the U.S. Pacific Command to continue the positive military-to-military engagement with Timor-Leste and contribute to our Mission strategic goal of maintaining peace and stability by encouraging the development of a professional, civilian-led Timorese military. This visit achieved a long awaited engagement with the Timorese navy which was welcomed by the Timorese Naval Commander Captain Pedro as a terrific 'initial' step in our navy-to-navy relationship. From a public relations perspective, American soldiers and sailors at liberty in Dili is an increasingly normal and welcome sight.

16. (SBU) Post extends special thanks to the Commander of the USS Reuben James CDR David Miller, the Operations Officer LT Anthony D. Pangjogie, and NCIS SA John Beliveau for all of their assistance in making this a smooth and successful visit. We

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would also like to extend our gratitude to the 7th Fleet's Spouse Group and Mrs. Nonie Bird for their donations to the Alola Foundation. In particular, Mrs. Bird's efforts on behalf of the Alola Foundation following her previous visit to Timor-Leste were greatly appreciated.

17. (SBU) While this trip was very successful overall, it would have ran smoother if the USS Reuben James had sent an ADVON team per the Embassy's request. The ADVON could have assisted in coordinating the community relation activities and the naval engagement. The USS Reuben James' constrained communications bandwidth en route to Timor-Leste made communication and coordination exceptionally difficult, compelling the Embassy to make unilateral decisions on behalf of the ship. The use of an ADVON could have relieved some of these problems and better prepared the embassy and USS Reuben James.

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